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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the expansion of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) to include home and community-based training activities by active two-party service contracting with handicapped students. Specific topics include a justification of homework, current status of the IEP process, current instructional problems, the viability of homework as a potential solution, and possible means of implementation. The paper contends that special education placement would be qualitatively enhanced and expanded by the contractual guarantee of continuity in home and community learning experiences. It is suggested that the IEP contract be reorganized to touch upon homework. (Author/CL)

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# HOMEWORK AND THE IEP: A new combination

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## Abstract

The authors discuss the expansion of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) to include home and community-based training activities by active two-party service contracting. Specific topics include a justification of homework, current status of the IEP process, current instructional problems, the viability of homework as a potential solution, and possible means of implementation. The authors contend that special education placement would be qualitatively enhanced and expanded by the contractual guarantee of continuity in home and community learning experiences.

Homework and the IEP: A new combination

In 1981, Secretary of Education Bell created the National Commission on Education. This Commission was charged with the responsibility of examining the quality of education in the United States and of making a report to the nation within eighteen months. This report was issued in April 1983 under the title A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform. Among the recommendations reported were the following:

a) Recommendation C: Time

> We recommend that significantly more time be devoted to learning the New Basics. This will require more effective use of the existing school day, a longer school day, or a lengthened school year (p. 29).

b) Implementing Recommendations

> 1. Students in high school should be assigned far more homework than is now the case.
>
> 4.....If necessary, additional time should be found to meet the special needs of slow learners, the gifted, and others who need more instructional diversity than can be accommodated during a conventional school day or school year (p. 29).

c) Recommendation E: Leadership and Fiscal Support

> 6. The Commission calls upon educators, parents and public officials to assist in bringing about educational reform proposed in this report. " (p. 33)

If the general public is alerted by the national press coverage given to this report, homework policies and procedures will be subjected to

both public and professional scrutiny. Teachers will probably be concerned over the task of assigning homework that will be relevant to students' learning experiences. Further, administrators may appoint local committees to study the topic and local boards of education may seek to adopt policy statements. Additionally, parents' interest will increase. Within such a pervasive national concern relative to all students, who will consider the handicapped? The mandates for action set forth by the Commission demand a response from special education professionals and consumers on the timely issues of homework and other forms of extended programming efforts.

Often, school boards ignore the teaching that could be provided by parents of handicapped students after school hours (Strenecky, McLoughlin, & Edge, 1979). However, to bring about the educational reforms addressed in the Commission's report, special educators and parents will have to work closely together in developing and implementing them in programs for students in special education. The purpose of this article is to examine the role of homework in special education and to evaluate the Individual Education Plan (IEP) as a mechanism by which to facilitate its inclusion.

Justification of Homework

Hastings (1972) reported that teachers favor homework for all children. Reasons for support were that homework opens up new areas for student exploration and that it provides time to complete work beyond that allotted during the school day. Two other investigators have supported homework for all students (Mathews, 1961; Mims, 1975). Their justifications included homework as: a) being helpful to a student, b) helping students make better exam scores, c) enabling students to complete unfinished assignments and d) teaching students to establish good, individualized, independent work habits early in life.

In addition to the advantages discussed, empirical evidence exists to confirm the benefits of homework -- defined as any educational task designed for accomplishment with or without parental help outside school hours -- for the handicappped student. While much has been written of home-based parent delivered education in the context of early childhood special education (Maybanks & Bryce, 1979), the evidence for the benefits of homework for school-aged children is small but generally positive. For example, Hofmeister and Reaves (1974) reported gains as parents taught math combinations. Posttest results indicated that gains were maintained. Strang (1968) reported research indicating that systematically assigned homework contributed to a markedly higher

degree of academic achievement for the slow learner. Two studies (Raim, Cox, & Krevisky, 1981; Thurston, 1981) investigated the effectiveness of home tutoring using students with reading deficiencies and both reported student gains.

A comprehensive review of the benefits of homework with the handicapped population was done by Mims, Anderson, (1983) and Frith (1983). Specific findings relative to the learning disabled population were reported by Eaton (1978), George (1978), Sasso, Hughes, Critchlow, Falcone, and Delquadri (1981), Shapero and Forbes (1981), Simcox (1980), Townes (1979), and Trovato and Bucher (1980) . Two studies done by Baig (1977, 1981) reported similar gains with mentally retarded special ecucation students. These gains argue for the necessity for continued field-based research on the effects of homework.

Individual Education Programs

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-142) dictates the involvement of parents with the individual education program of their handicapped child (Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull, & Curry, 1980; Goldstein & Turnbull, 1982; Strenecky, McLoughlin, & Edge, 1979; Turnbull, Strickland, & Goldstein, 1978). To satisfy this mandate, many shcool boards have involved parents, and appropriately documented this involvement, soley in the development of the written IEP. The original

purpose of the IEP was the codification of the individualized educational therapy prescribed for implementation by school authorities. The protagonist role is assumed by professionals, largely due to the necessity to comply with federal regulations. The role of the parents began as that of consentor to prescribed treatment, in a manner similar to a patient's consent to hospital care and treatment. Fostered by such advocates as Turnbull and Turnbull in their writings from 1975 to the present, the balance of input into the IEP contract negotiations has shifted towards the parent as active protagonist in the development of the written plan. MacMillan and Turnbull (1983) reported a variety of roles that parents may assume during the IEP process, ranging from passive to active, based upon individual need and/or preference. However, the focal point of the contract has remained the determination of educational experiences to be delivered by the eduational agency within the confines of its human and temporal resources.

Current Instructional Problems

After eight years of discussion and refinement of the IEP process, several programmatic concerns have arisen in special education, some alluded to in the Commission's report, that have not been resolved with the current parameters of the IEP contract. Among the most notable of these

currently unresolved concerns are the need for extended year (summer school) and twenty-four hour (all day) programming.

By its current functional definition, the IEP process can never realize solutions to these concerns because the focus of the contract is solely upon the services to be delivered by the educational agency. Resources beyond those of the agency must be utilized to meet the need for comprehensive, extended services. Similarly, other programmatic concerns such as the need for normal goals and educational settings, methods and materials that produce generalizable learning products, the learning efficacy derived from temporal and methodological continuity, and the search for pragmatic applications of training will not be fully resolved under contemporary IEP conditions.

Homework as a Potential Solution

The instructional difficulties mentioned above will remain as long as the instructional processes are restricted to implementation at the educational agency by professional personnel. Relevant programming in normal family and community settings can best be implemented at 'normal' times, that is after school hours and on weekends. Planned educational experiences, to be accomplished after agency hours, more commonly called homework, could provide partial or total solutions to these programmatic concerns.

For the educational agency and professional service provider, the benefits of a plan for extended educational activities would include increased learning efficacy as opportunities for repetition and distributed practice are expanded. The access to normal community and family settings would reduce the necessity of artificially 'recreating' such settings within the school or arranging occasional, expensive field trips of little lasting value. Homework could also provide another benefit unlikely to be obtained in the school setting: the opportunity to have instruction provided by more than one teacher. The development of homework as an instructional technology in special education may serve to redefine the roles of home, school, and community in the education of the handicapped student.

The addition of homework to school based educational services can serve to fill gaps perceived by parents in present service providers. Successful home and community based training will depend on cooperative planning and training (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). A valuable by-product of this interaction will be increased parental knowledge of the student's program of study and his progress in it. Communication with educational professionals would be essential rather than cursory. Most importantly, more than half of the student's educational experiences can and will occur on tasks and in settings judged by parents as most relevant for their unique circumstances.

The IEP Rethought

The addition of prescribed homework to the spectrum of special education services provided under the auspices of the educational agency may serve to resolve some programmatic impasses. Appropriate and productive utilization of this tool in special education will depend upon two factors: a) the development of teacher skills in planning and monitoring homework assignments and b) the willingness of parents to participate actively in the planning and provision of educational experiences beyond regular school hours. The first factor depends largely on the initiation of research on the implementation of special education methods outside the school settings and the creation of successful parent training models.

The second factor can be realized by a reorganization of the parameters of the IEP contract. The IEP can represent a design of comprehensive goals, objectives, and methods that, if used conjointly by school and home, will enable a student to attain generalized learning skills. This requires a change from the traditional conceptualization of the IEP as a two-party agreement regarding the services to be rendered by only one party. Rethought, the IEP becomes a two-party contract embodying activities to be accomplished by both parties. To this end, special education placement would be qualitatively enhanced and expanded

by the contractual guarantee of continuity in home and community learning activities.

Conclusion

The expansion of the IEP to include home and community based training activities by means of active two party service contracting appears to hold much promise for the realization of optimal educational plans as now conceived. Many desired programmatic benefits can only be obtained by the formal introduction of homework that extends instructional efforts begun by the school. However, one must not advocate this as the only viable position. Parents may decide to forfeit an active instructional role, relegating it solely to the school setting while simultaneously forfeiting the potential benefits of extended programming. Special education placement cannot be made contingent upon the institution of the two-party IEP. Instead, acceptance must be built upon the knowledge of the benefits for both parties of service providers and of the optimal programs that can be made possible for the individual student. This may prove to be a significant step in the search for quality in special education services.

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